

Noah's Ark Similarity to Other Flood Myths Explained [Gilgamesh & Atrahasis]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXTxOOIIVE6k>

Transcript: <https://dontveter.com/ec/floodmyth.pdf>

The story of Noah's ark is one of the most famous stories of all time.

We've all seen the children's book version of the story with cute little animal drawings.

But when you think about it the story is actually quite a harrowing tale.

But did you know that Noah's Ark has been accused of being a ripoff!?

That's right, just like Vanilla Ice ripping off Queen, the story of Noah's Ark could have been stolen!

So what does that mean? Well, our story starts here at the British Museum in London, but way back in 1872.

A man named George Smith was working as a classifier at the Museum.

He had a passion for Ancient Archaeology and translation.

One evening while working late he discovered a stone fragment and became so animated that he started taking his clothes off in excitement.

That's right! THIS man took his shirt off like his team had scored the winner in the world cup final... because he found a rock.

But not just any rock... No, this very stone tablet still in the British museum today.

What he had discovered was a flood story that predated the Bible, entitled the Epic of Gilgamesh.

A few years later he found this second tablet, the Epic of Atrahasis, which contained an even older flood story.

The crazy thing is these flood stories are strangely similar to Noah's Ark.

And so there have been lots of spectacular headlines and stories that have interpreted this information to mean that the Biblical tale is nothing more than a copycat of these older flood stories.

But is that fair? What's really going on with these flood stories?

In order to make sense of it lets take a look at one of these flood stories, The Epic of Atrahasis.

I actually made a fully animated retelling of the Atrahasis flood story, I'll leave a link to that in the description.

But here's a quick summary of the story. In this world there's greater gods and lesser gods.

The lesser gods were burdened with all the hard labour.

They had to heap up the mountains and dig the rivers.

They got fed up with this and rioted outside the greater gods' temple demanding to be heard.

The greater gods heard their plea and came up with a solution.

They used blood and dirt to make creatures called humans.

At first everything was great, the humans did all the work.

The gods are loving this, but quickly the humans grow large in number and they keep the gods awake with their noise.

So Enlil one of the big boss gods sends a drought and a famine to lower their numbers.

But they repopulate and continue to keep him up at night.

So he decides to send a great flood to wipe them all out.

And this is where things start to seem familiar.

Enki one of Enlil's counterparts appears before one of the humans named Atrahasis and warns him about the flood.

He tells him to build a boat that will save his life and to put many animals on board as well. Sound familiar?

Well Atrahasis builds the boat. He puts the animals on board and the flood waters come down.

The gods are terrified at how scary it is.

When the flood waters recede the gods are starving, they're hungry and thirsty, because there's no humans to make food for them any more.

But when they discover Atrahasis has survived and he has offered sacrifices to them they are overjoyed!

But this infuriates Enlil who is mad at Enki for betraying him.

Enki calms him down and they end up making an agreement.

To keep the human population low they would introduce curses like death, miscarriages and forcing people to be celibate.

And that's the end of the story.

So why do these stories exist?

Well Like Noah's ark, this was a worldview shaping story.

This is a story people would have read to understand their place and purpose in the world.

Possibly to give meaning to the sufferings of life, that they have some greater purpose.

There are several similarities to the story of Noah's ark.

In both stories, the humans have created some sort of problem.

And the solution is to send a flood. And a god warns one of the humans about the impending flood.

In both stories they build a boat. And in both stories they put animals on board.

And the one who is saved offers sacrifices at the end.

It's these similarities that tell us that however Noah's ark came to be in the Bible, the implied readers were aware of these other ancient flood stories and the worldview that they promoted.

But Noah's ark isn't just a copy of the story.

It shows us that Noah's Ark is using these story ideas as kind of like a rebuttal in a debate.

So what are the differences? In Atrahasis there are many gods who fight amongst each other.

In Genesis there is just one, the creator of all things.

In Atrahasis the humans annoy the gods and they are wiped out for rather impulsive reasons.

In Genesis, the humans have done evil and God is saddened by his creation.

In Atrahasis, one god has to betray another to rescue Atrahasis, but in Genesis, God despite his judgment, shows mercy and rescues some of his creation.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, in Atrahasis the humans are forever cursed.

But, in Noah's ark God promises that he would not repeat this event and he enters into a relationship with humans.

So, if Atrahasis is a worldview shaping story, what does it say about the world?

Well, we can't know for sure but It would appear to paint a picture where humans are somewhat of a frustration to the gods, the gods are just like humans given over to impulses and changes of mood.

It's just the way life has to be.

But if the Biblical story is rebutting these ideas then Noah's ark is a story that recognizes human failure and God's sadness at evil.

Yet, even in his judgment, he has mercy and rescues some and, understood in its original context, as speaking against the worldview presented by these other ancient flood stories.

The story argues that God is not like the gods of Babylon.

The important thing is, the discovery of these other ancient flood stories doesn't prove that the Bible stole these stories.

If anything, it actually helps us understand the stories about how a shirtless hipster changed our understanding of Noah's Ark forever.

